NIETZSCHE'S DOCTRINE OF ETERNAL RECURRENCE

By Karl Löwith

"That the separate philosophical ideas are not anything optional . . . that, however suddenly and arbitrarily they seem to appear in the history of thought, they nevertheless belong just as much to a system as the collective members of the fauna of a continent—is betrayed in the end by the circumstance: how unfailingly the most diverse philosophers always fill in again a definite fundamental scheme of *possible* philosophies. Under an invisible spell they always revolve once more in the same orbit. . . . Their thinking is in fact far less a discovery than a re-recognising, a remembering, a return and a home-coming to a far-off, ancient common-household of the soul, out of which those ideas formerly grew: philosophising is so far a kind of atavism of the highest order."

Beyond Good and Evil, § 20.

Nietzsche, like any thinker, may be approached at the point of least resistance, or at the point of greatest resistance. We encounter little difficulty in reading Nietzsche, the brilliant though often repellent writer of aphorisms on cultural problems. But we find great difficulty in trying to read him as a consistent philosopher. Certainly it was not his desire to be merely a writer "in season" but to be "a first" and "a last" philosopher, in particular the philosopher of Eternal Recurrence, and thereby of Eternity.

It is true that Nietzsche was also a philosopher of his time. But his innumerable reflections on the cultural problems of our age are to be understood within the wide horizon of our twofold inheritance, the classic and the Christian tradition, both of which believed in an eternal order. As a *philosopher* of our time Nietzsche was not concerned with the time being, but was *unzeitgemäss,* out of season. In the preface to the second *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtung* on the use and abuse of history he defines his untimeliness by saying that he could not have ventured to judge the present age if he had not been a pupil of the classic age. The time in which Western man and thought originated was to him the source and standard by which he could hope to become effective in and against the present time. Toward the end of his reflections on history he goes even further, outlining the possibility of a "super-historical" standpoint from which the whole distinction between past and future loses its relevance. For if we look at the totality of being and time, every moment is equally significant. The most radical statement, however, of Nietzsche's *Unzeitgemässheit* is to

be found in his attack on Richard Wagner: "What is the first and last thing that a philosopher demands of himself? To overcome his age in himself, to become 'timeless.' With what then does the philosopher have the greatest fight? With all that in him which makes him the child of his time. Very well then! I am just as much a child of my age as Wagner, i.e., I am a decadent. The only difference is that I have recognised the fact, that I have struggled against it. The philosopher in me has struggled against it."[1] By this attempt to free himself from mere contemporaneousness, Nietzsche became a philosopher of his age and, one hundred years after, a worthy subject of commemoration.

In 1884, after the completion of *Zarathustra,* Nietzsche wrote in a letter from Venice: "My work has time, I do not at all want to be misjudged as though I were concerned with the particular task of the present time. Fifty years hence a few men will probably realize what I have done. For the time being it is not only difficult but (according to the laws of historical perspective) simply impossible to discuss me publicly without remaining infinitely behind the truth." "Fifty years hence" falls exactly in 1934, and at that time Nietzsche's "truth" had indeed become a matter of public discussion and worldwide significance. This truth has an exoteric and an esoteric aspect, the one called Neo-paganism,[2] and the other Eternal Recurrence.

The doctrine of Eternal Recurrence, which seems to us today the strangest if not the most absurd invention of a modern mind, was to Nietzsche himself the fundamental issue of his philosophy. Like the Christian gospel a stumbling-block to the Jews and a foolishness to the Greeks, Nietzsche's gospel of Eternal Recurrence is a stumbling-block and foolishness to those who still believe in the modern gospel of progress, which is a secularized form of Christian eschatology. Whether foolish or wise, the doctrine of Eternal Recurrence is the key to Nietzsche's philosophy and it also illuminates his historic significance, because it revives the controversy between Christianity and paganism.

Nietzsche's doctrine is a definite answer to a definite problem which can be discovered in his earliest thought. He treats it for the first time at the age of eighteen, twenty years before *Zara-*

[1] *The Case of Wagner,* Preface.

[2] See John N. Figgis, *The Will to Freedom or the Gospel of Nietzsche and the Gospel of Christ,* 309 ff.

thustra, in two papers written at college on *Fate and History* and *The Freedom of the Will and Fate.*[3] At the beginning he confesses that it will be extremely difficult to establish a standpoint from which to judge our traditional Christian interpretation of life. Such an attempt, he says, may well be the task of a lifetime, for how can we discard with impunity the authority of two thousand years? It would appear youthful frivolity to embark without a compass upon a sea of doubt in search of a new continent.[4] Why not cling to history and natural science instead of indulging in vague speculations on the Christian or non-Christian meaning of life? But we cannot avoid the fundamental question of man's significance in the totality of the world, of the meaning of human will and history within the non-human universe. For is history not very casual and contingent as compared with the eternal revolution of the heavenly bodies and its cosmic necessity? Are the events of history perhaps only the dial-plate indicating the ever-self-repeating movement of a hand which has no inner relation to the indicated events? Or is there an eternal cycle, comprising human decisions as well as natural occurrences? Can we conceive humanity as an inmost circle within the circle of cosmic fate, so that the hidden spring in "the great clock of being"[5] is humanity? To conceive, however, such a synthesis of the free will which creates history with universal fate or necessity, the philosopher would have to transcend the human-all-too-human standpoint and look at things from beyond humanity. It is the standpoint which Nietzsche eventually found in his conception of the superman Zarathustra, "six thousand feet beyond man and time." At first, however, he states the antinomy between Will and Fate. "In the freedom of the will lies the principle of emancipation and separation from the embracing totality of being, while fate reintegrates the emancipated will into it. At the same time fate evokes also the power and freedom of willing as a counter-movement to the stubbornness of necessity. Absolute freedom would transform man into a creator-God, absolute necessity into an automaton."[6]

[3] Nietzsches *Jugendschriften* (not translated), Musarion Ausgabe, I., 60 (1923).

[4] Cf. in Nietzsche's later writings the symbol of Columbus, e.g., *The Dawn of Day,* § 575; the poem *The New Columbus; The Will to Power,* § 957.

[5] See the recurrence of this metaphor in *Zarathustra,* Oscar Levy ed. (London, 1909), pp. 176 and 270; *The Joyful Wisdom,* § 341.

[6] Cf. the restatement of this antinomy in *Zarathustra,* 191 and 246.

Apparently this problem can be solved only "if free will were the highest potency of fate."

A year later Nietzsche wrote an autobiographical sketch in which he formulated once more the problem to which the will to eternal recurrence became the answer. After a short description of his Christian-Protestant background he discusses the stages by which man has outgrown everything which once sheltered him, and then he asks the question: "But where is the ring which will at last (after the dissolution of the Christian order by which man and the world had a common ground as creatures of God) encompass him? Is it the *World* or is it *God*?" Interpreted in terms of Nietzsche's mature philosophy this alternative means: is the ultimate standard and pattern of our existence the classic view of the world as an eternal cosmos, revolving in periodic cycles, or is it the Christian view of the world as a unique creation out of nothing, called forth by the omnipotence of a non-natural God? Is the ultimate being a divine cosmos recurrent like a circle in itself, or a personal God revealing himself not primarily in nature but in and to humanity under the sign of the cross?[7]

Twenty years later Nietzsche had definitely decided that it is the World which redeems our contingent existence, reintegrating the Christian ego (which "since Copernicus has fallen from the center toward an x") into the order of cosmic necessity, i.e., into the eternal recurrence of the same. The first explicit announcement of this new doctrine occurs in *The Joyful Wisdom* (§§ 341 and 342) under the title "The Heaviest Burden," and in connection with the complementary announcement of "The Death of God" (§ 343). "This life, as thou livest it now, as thou hast lived it, thou needst must live it again, and an infinite number of times; and there will be in it nothing new; but every grief and every joy, every thought and every sigh, all the infinitely great and the infinitely little in thy life must return for thee, and all this in the same sequence and the same order. And also this spider and the moonlight through the trees, and also this moment and myself." Here the idea is introduced, however, not as a metaphysical doctrine but as an ethical imperative: to live as if "the eternal hourglass of existence" will ever be turned again, in order to impress on each of our actions the weight of an inescapable responsibility.

[7] The universal and not merely ethical significance of the cross is a common topic in the writings of the founders of the church, e.g., in Justin, *Apol.* I, 55; Tertullian, *Adv. Mar.* III, 18; *Ad Nat.* I, 12.

In *Zarathustra,* where eternal recurrence is the basic inspiration of the whole work, it is not presented as an hypothesis but as a metaphysical truth. Zarathustra pretends to reveal "the highest kind of being"; in conformity with the abiding truth of being, Zarathustra is also a "plan of a new way of life." The characteristic subtitle which Nietzsche had planned for his chief work, and which he also used in the various plans for the *Will to Power,* is "Midday and Eternity." Midday is to be understood as noontide, as the supreme instant of fulfilment, the climax and crisis in which the vision of eternity becomes once and for all decisive. The experience of this eternal instant is described as an ecstatic inspiration[8] in which all being becomes speech in the most appropriate similes. Thus Zarathustra's parables are not intended as mere poetry but as a metaphysical language.[9]

In terms of the problem of time, what led Zarathustra to his crucial experience is briefly this: it is a conversion and rebirth to a new "great healthiness" out of an equally great sickness or despair, a sickness unto death. The prophet (*Wahr-sager*) of modern nihilism, whose counterpart is the prophet of eternal recurrence (for the latter is the exact reverse of the first) describes the sickness of modern man thus: "I saw a great sadness come over mankind. The best turned weary of their works. A doctrine appeared, a faith ran beside it: all is empty, all is alike, all hath been. . . . To be sure we have harvested; but why have all our fruits become rotten and brown? What was it fell last night from the evil moon? In vain was all our labor, poison hath all our wine become, the evil eye hath singed yellow our fields and hearts. Arid have we all become. . . . All our fountains have dried up, even the sea hath receded. All the ground trieth to gape, but the depth will not swallow! Alas, where is there still a sea in which one could be drowned? so soundeth our plaint across shallow marshlands!"[10] The critical time in which out of sickness great

[8] *Ecce Homo,* 101 ff.

[9] *Ecce homo,* 102 f and 108; cf. *The Twilight of the Idols,* 111; *The Genealogy of Morals,* Preface. The language of Zarathustra renews the old literary form of the didactic poem and of gnomic wisdom. Modern men believe rather in the artificial terms of natural science. But theologians and philosophers at least should appreciate the peculiar accuracy of similes and their power of indicating truth—unless they want to discard the language of Plato and of the Gospels as "unscientific."

[10] *Zarathustra,* 160 f; cf. 268.

health is born is referred to as "the highest time"[11] in the double sense of despair, when time is running out, and of blessed climax.[12] Preceding the stillness of supreme blessedness is the ghostly stillness of despair.[13] The dialectic of despair and redemption, of depth and height, of darkness and light is finally overcome in an "abyss of light" the time of which is a "standstill of time." Hence the decisive instant of noon-tide is neither short nor long but a timeless *nunc stans* or eternal. In it the despair announced by the prophet of nothingness is turned into the bliss announced by Zarathustra, the prophet of the highest kind of being. Instead of despairing that all is alike and in vain Zarathustra rejoices in the freedom from all-too-human purposes in the eternal recurrence of all things, whose time is an ever present circle, while the time of ordinary hopes and fears, of regret and expectation, is a straight line into an endless future and past.[14] The discovery of this *circulus vitiosus deus* is to Nietzsche "the way out of two thousand years of falsehood," liquidating the Christian era when man believed in a progressive history determined by an absolute beginning and end, by creation and original sin at the one end, consummation and last judgment at the other end—both eventually secularized into the modern idea of an indefinite progress from primitive backwardness to civilized progressiveness.

Over against this modern illusion resulting in "the last man,"[15] Zarathustra proclaims the eternal recurrence of life in its unmoralized fullness of creation *and* destruction, of joy *and* suffering, of good *and* evil. While he is still convalescent his animals say: "Everything goeth, everything returneth; eternally rolleth the wheel of existence. Everything dieth, everything blossometh forth again; eternally runneth the wheel of existence. Everything breaketh, everything is integrated anew; eternally buildeth itself the same house of existence. All things separate, all things again greet one another; eternally true to itself remaineth the ring of existence. Every moment beginneth existence, around every Here roll-

[11] *Ibid.,* 156.

[12] Correspondingly two opposite sounds are to be heard at that time: the cry of distress of the higher men (291 ff.), and the deep stroke of the clock at the great noontide which is also a midnight (390 ff.) in which all things become eternalized.

[13] *Zarathustra,* 225 and 175.

[14] *Ibid.,* 187 ff.

[15] *Ibid.,* 12.

eth the ball There. The middle is everywhere. Crooked is the path of eternity.'"[16] Remembering, however, his sickness unto death, Zarathustra is not yet prepared to accept the idea that even the meanest type of man will recur again and again till his animals persuade him to reconcile himself with his particular fate to proclaim this redeeming doctrine. Now he is indeed the superman, a man who has overcome himself by accepting voluntarily what cannot be otherwise, thus transforming an alien fate into his proper destiny. From now on he lives by the experience of a perfect noon-tide when "the world is perfect" and time has flown away into the well of eternity.[17] He is now a "blesser and yea-sayer." "This, however, is my blessing: to stand above everything as its own heaven, its round roof, its azure bell and eternal security. . . . For all things are baptized at the font of eternity and beyond good and evil. . . . This freedom and celestial serenity did I put like an azure bell above all things when I taught that over them and through them no 'Eternal Will' willeth.'"[18] Eventually he dedicates to the higher man his dithyramb on all Eternity.

O man! Take heed!
What saith deep midnight's voice indeed?
I slept my sleep—,
From deepest dream I've woke, and plead:—
The world is deep,
And deeper than the day could read.
Deep is its woe—,
Joy—deeper still than grief can be:
Woe saith: Hence! Go!
But joys all want eternity—,
—Want deep, profound eternity![19]

This "drunken song" repeats the two songs on eternity at the end of the third book. They express the final unqualified "Yes and Amen" to all being as such, embracing and justifying also the existence of man. By accepting with an "ultimate will"—willing backward the past as well as forward the future—eternal necessity as "the highest constellation of being," the original contradiction between free Will or history and Fate seems to be solved.

[16] *Ibid.,* 266.
[17] *Ibid.,* 336 ff.
[18] *Ibid.,* 200 f.
[19] *Ibid.,* 398.

Schild der Notwendigkeit!
Höchstes Gestirn des Seins!
das kein Wunsch erreicht,
das kein Nein befleckt,
ewiges Ja des Seins,
ewig bin ich dein Ja:
denn ich liebe dich, o Ewigkeit![20]

Zarathustra's soul is "the most fated soul which out of joy flingeth itself into chance."[21]

Not only does Eternal Recurrence answer the problem of Nietzsche's first writings; it is also the fundamental thought in his latest work. Indeed, the description of Zarathustra's "soul" is identical in structure with the "world" of Dionysos as described in the last aphorism of the Will to Power. Both represent the highest kind of being, and the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysos is also the prophet of Eternal Recurrence.[22] And just as the *Will to Power* has as its critical motive and aim the transvaluation of all Christian values (the *Antichrist* being the first book of the *Will to Power*) so Zarathustra is the most elaborate countergospel to the Christian gospel and its theological presuppositions, for the doctrine of Eternal Recurrence counteracts the doctrine of creation with all its moral consequences.[23] Dionysos as well as

[20] The English translation of *Ruhm und Ewigkeit* (part 4) is unintelligible.

[21] *Zarathustra,* 255; cf. *Ecce Homo,* on Zarathustra, § 6; *The Twilight of the Idols,* § 49; *Lieder des Prinzen Vogelfrei: An Goethe.* Accordingly Nietzsche describes also personal coincidences of his life, e.g., the completion of Zarathustra with the death of Richard Wagner, as "sublime Zufälle," manifesting sublime necessity or fate.

[22] *The Twilight of the Idols,* 120; *Ecce Homo,* 73.

[23] That Christian ethics is a consequence of Christian *faith* and thereby dependent on a definite *creed* is most evident in regard to the doctrine of creation, for the whole Christian attitude of man toward the universe, himself and his fellowmen depends indeed on the assumption that all of them are strictly "creatures." As Chr. Dawson (*Progress and Religion*) pointed out: to anyone who does not accept a theistic world-view the idea of an absolute beginning and end must be repugnant. Actually the modern scientific mind has never assimilated the Christian idea of creation. From H. Spencer and Haeckel to A. Rey (*Le Retour Éternel et la Philosophie de la Physique* [1927]), there has been a whole series of attempts to provide new scientific justification for the theory of an eternal recurrence. Nietzsche, who saw that it is hopeless to maintain the Christian standards as moral "ideals" apart from the belief in the reality of creation and consummation, opposed this faith most vigorously by restating the doctrine of eternal recurrence. In this respect he was a much better theologian than most modern Christians, who sur-

Zarathustra are essentially against Christ. Zarathustra's friends celebrate his memory in utter blasphemy by the festival of the donkey,[24] that symbol of stupidity, who repeats time and again nothing but "ye-a."

Eternity as the eternal Yea or self-affirmation of being which repeats itself in periodic cycles, remains throughout the *leitmotiv* of Nietzsche's intellectual passion. In a letter written after the onset of insanity he confesses that though he would have preferred to remain a simple professor he had no choice but to sacrifice himself as "the buffoon of the new eternities."

If there is such a thing as a "history of ideas," then the idea of eternal recurrence is an amazing example, considering Nietzsche's revival of this classic idea after two thousand years of Christian tradition.[25] Of course, the idea itself did not persist

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render all that makes Christianity substantial, consistent and attractive. Nietzsche, says J. N. Figgis, "is a standing witness that, even if you throw over the whole creed, you are no nearer to your end; you will have made ridiculous what was always hateful. That is all. . . . The very last thing that will attract is a Christianity with the supernatural left out, and all the old moral ideals intact." (*l.c.*, 305 f.).

[24] *Zarathustra,* 384 ff.; cf. *Ecce Homo,* 60. It is interesting to note that the adoration of an ass was a popular charge against the early Christians. See P. Labriolle, *La Réaction Païenne* (Paris, 1934), 193 ff. There is, however, evidence that in the middle ages an ass was indeed worshipped in memory of Mary's flight to Egypt. See G. Ch. Lichtenberg, *Vermischte Schriften* (1802), IV, 536 ff.

[25] Sporadically the idea reappeared throughout the Middle Ages in the Aristotelian theology, e.g., of Siger de Brabant, and no less a writer than Dante imagined the Trinity as three revolving circles into which the image of man had to be fitted miraculously.

> Veder voleva, come si convenne
> l'imago al cerchio, e come vi s'indova;
> ma non eran da ciò le proprie penne:
> se non che la mia mente fu percossa
> da un fulgore in che sua voglia venne.
> All'alta fantasia qui mancò possa;
> ma già volgeva il mio disiro e il *velle,*
> si come rota ch'egualmente è mossa,
> l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle. (XXXIII, 137 ff.)

Superseding the absolute beginning and end of the Christian drama of creation and consummation, man is finally redeemed by co-revolving with the love-inspired universe! A similar blending of the Christian and classic world-view characterizes also the Prologue to Goethe's *Faust.* In modern philosophy the idea of eternal recurrence is discussed, e.g., by Hume, Fichte, and most seriously by Schelling. Very interesting with regard to Nietzsche is O. Weininger's essay on the irreversible

and reappear like an old relic by chance excavation; rather, the historical situation became again controversial. It is contemporary Christianity which evoked in Nietzsche the revival of an idea which was basic for pagan thinking. Placed at the final stage of an evaporated Christianity, he had to search for new sources of the future, and he found them in classic paganism. The death of the Christian God made him again understand the Ancient World.[26] It is of secondary importance that he knew this world through his professional studies as a classical philologist. Many scholars were familiar with the doctrine of eternal recurrence in Heraclitus and Empedocles, Plato and Aristotle, Eudemos and the Stoics, but only Nietzsche perceived in it creative possibilities for the future, in opposition to a dying Christianity.

Nietzsche did not realize, however, that his own "contra Christianos" was an exact replica in reverse of the "contra gentiles" of the fathers of the church. Not only the doctrine of Eternal Recurrence, which was discussed by Justin, Origen and Augustine,[27] but all the general topics of Christian apologetics against pagan philosophers, recur in Nietzsche's philosophy with the standpoints interchanged.[28] For Nietzsche's philosophy, and in particular his

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character of time from the moral viewpoint over against the "immorality" of the self-containing circle and cycle.

[26] One may even question whether original Christianity did not have a similar effect on the revival of the old pagan Gods. If we can trust the paradoxical wit of G. K. Chesterton, the situation was about this: "The Gods had really died long before Christ was born. What had taken their place was simply the God of government—Divus Caesar. The pagans of the real Roman Empire were nothing if not respectable. It is said that when Christ was born the cry went through the world that Pan was dead. The truth is that when Christ was born Pan for the first time began to stir in his grave. The pagan Gods had become pure fables when Christianity gave them a new lease of life as devils."

[27] Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* I, Introduction; Origen, *Contra Celsum* IV, 67; V, 20; *De Principiis* II, 3; Augustine, *The City of God*, XI, 4 and XII, 10–13.

[28] Cf., e.g., Nietzsche's arguments with those of Celsus and Porphyrius. Little has been added to the ancient arguments by the modern attacks on Christianity—except the Christian pathos of being "Antichrist" instead of being philosopher and cultured. To the pagan philosophers as well as to Nietzsche the Christian faith is crude and absurd. It destroys the natural harmony and rationality of the divine cosmos by an arbitrary initiative. The Christian religion is to both of them a subversive revolt of uneducated, obstinate people who have no sense for aristocratic virtues, civic obligations and ancestral traditions, because they are low, vile and ignorant. Their God is shamelessly inquisitive and all-too-human, "a God of all dark corners" and a staff for the weary. To hang on the cross means to them to

"Antichrist," is a repetition of the old complaint that Christians are *hostes humani generis,* a mean race of slaves, people of bad breeding and taste. This historical coincidence of the ancient and modern attack against Christianity indicates the lasting significance of the first and the historical importance of the second, though the first had been forgotten until Nietzsche resumed it.

On account, however, of the new historical situation which led Nietzsche to rediscover the ancient doctrine, the idea of eternal recurrence did not simply recur as the same, but was greatly and fatally changed. It was Nietzsche's noble passion to sing a new song of the "Innocence" of cyclic being and becoming—on the level, however, of a Christian "Experience." Thus *Zarathustra* it from cover to cover indeed a counter-*gospel,* a new sermon on immortality in the Kingdom of God. To the Greeks Eternal Recurrence was the manifestation of a universal rational order and beauty, to Nietzsche it is "the heaviest burden" because it conflicts with his radically modern will. To the Greeks the eternal recurrence of generation and corruption explained natural occurrences as well as historical events, to Nietzsche the acceptance of eternal recurrence requires a standpoint beyond man and time. The Greeks felt awe and reverence for fate, Nietzsche makes the superhuman effort to love it. He undoubtedly achieved the metamorphosis from the Christian "Thou shalt" to the modern "I will," but hardly the crucial transformation from the "I will" to the "I am" of the cosmic child which is "innocence and forgetfulness, a new beginning and a self-rolling wheel."[29] As a modern man Nietzsche was so hopelessly divorced from any genuine loyalty to the earth and from the feeling of eternal security under the bell of heaven that his great effort to re-marry man's destiny to cosmic fate or to "translate man back into nature" as the original text could not but be frustrated. Thus, wherever he tries to develop his doctrine rationally it breaks asunder in two irreconcilable pieces: in a presentation of eternal recurrence as an objective fact,

be divine. If the only thing which really matters is the salvation of the immortal "soul" of each individual, "why then show any public spirit, why be grateful for one's origin and one's forbears?" says Nietzsche like Celsus. Those "holy anarchists," called Christians, made it their piety to destroy the *imperium romanum* until even Teutons and other barbarians were able to become master of it. (*The Antichrist,* 130, 145, 186, 205, 221 f.)

[29] *Zarathustra,* 25 ff.

to be demonstrated by physics and mathematics, and in a quite different presentation of it as a subjective hypothesis, to be demonstrated by its ethical consequences.[30] It breaks asunder because the will to eternalize the chance fact of the modern ego does not fit into the assertion of the impersonal eternal cycle of the natural world.

Nietzsche was not so much the last disciple of the pagan God Dionysos as the first radical apostate of Christ. As such, however, he was what the "last pope" called him: "the most pious of the godless." When he created the figure of the last pope who is "out of office" after the death of God, he understood himself perfectly well, as a religious figure. Zarathustra and the pope understand each other because both are dedicated and consecrated and not profane. Toward the end of their conversation the old pope says to Zarathustra: "O Zarathustra, thou art more pious than thou believest, with such an unbelief! Some God in thee hath converted thee to thine ungodliness. . . . Nigh unto thee, though thou professest to be the ungodliest one, I feel a hale and holy odour of long benedictions: I feel glad and grieved thereby. Let me be thy guest, O Zarathustra, for a single night. Nowhere on earth shall I now feel better than with thee!"—"Amen! So shall it be, said Zarathustra with great astonishment."[31]

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[30] See the author's analysis of this two-fold presentation: *Nietzsche's Philosophie der ewigen Wiederkunft des Gleichen* (Berlin, 1935), 82 ff and 99 f. There the reader will find a more detailed discussion of the theoretical difficulties of the idea of eternal recurrence. In this paper I have tried to show the systematic place of that idea in the context of Nietzsche's philosophy and its relevance for the historical understanding of Nietzsche's antichristian position.

[31] *Zarathustra,* 319.